



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY EDITH BAKER BROWN, BRIAN HOOKER AND BRANDER MATTHEWS.

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH.*

"How much T. B. would have liked it himself!" said one of Aldrich's intimates the other day, in speaking of Mr. Greenslet's recently published life. "Other biographers were talked of, but I don't believe one of them would have succeeded so well. Greenslet has done it with precisely that light touch which does give one some impression of the man himself. Do you know, T. B. has always reminded me of those lines in 'Much Ado' (how beautifully Ellen Terry used to say them!), 'Then a star danced, and under that star I was born.'"

Indeed, one sees at a glance Mr. Greenslet's purpose in composing a volume of such modest dimensions, as biography goes nowadays, spaciouly printed, and with a list of chapters which reads like a pleasant story from Aldrich's own hand. Those who know how great was the wealth of material from which the biographer had to draw (for Aldrich's provocative gift of wit and friendship drew the best within his circle and made his correspondents almost as significant and delightful as he was himself) may regret many omissions. But the omissions suggest something of the artistic atmosphere of the subject as a more redundant narrative could not have done. Something of Aldrich's own delicate and fastidious art has gone into the composing of this volume, which remains chiefly a collection of letters with a thread of interpretative narrative and a critical postlude of perfect discrimination. Mr. Greenslet has none of the journalistic zeal for a provocative point of view. It is his subject rather than himself which he is content to let speak: "Tom Bailey," "The Hall

* "Life and Letters of Thomas Bailey Aldrich." By Ferris Greenslet. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Bedroom," "Arrival," "Beacon Hill," "Ponkapog," "The Atlantic Monthly," "Indian Summer Days," "The Last Years"—as we go on from chapter to chapter that bright and virginal soul which was Aldrich lives again as it lives in the pages of the "Bad Boy" and "Marjorie Daw," and more and more distinctly we trace in the man the traits of a poet whose art had a singular clearness of aim and of accomplishment.

Mr. Greenslet says of the letters: "Aldrich was not a born letter-writer; he never, like Lowell or Stevenson, cultivated letter-writing as a fine art, still less did he ever pour out his 'soul' in lyrical effusion, like, say, Lafcadio Hearn. He wrote a letter, when he did write one, chiefly because there was some compelling occasion to do so, but never perfunctorily, never without the magnetic personal touch, the sincere friendly expression, and rarely without some sparkle of his inextinguishable wit. If the reader will let them have their way with him, there is no intimacy of temperament, no significance of event, no hue of background that they will not disclose." This is the reader's own final conclusion, but his first impression—and first impressions have their value, however they may be qualified by afterthoughts—is not the "intimacy of temperament" that we associate with the poet. As a charming social spirit, as humorist, pre-eminently as critic, Aldrich reveals himself. But of "lyrical effusion," of "soul" biography, there is practically none. Of his letters to his betrothed the biographer says, "In their sincerity, courage and humor they lay bare the very heart of the man—so intimate is their character that the pen pauses in the attempt to characterize them, and quotation is out of the question." That is as Aldrich himself would have wished, who said about a certain letter of his own, quoted without his knowledge, "I hope it was not too *intime*, for I don't like to wear my heart on my sleeve. The more I feel, the less I say about it." And yet though the omission of these letters is a delicate and even eloquent omission, it alters the values of the portrait, and leaves our imagination to construct the inner life of passion and of poetry, all the more because with Aldrich, as with Hawthorne, the emotional reserve of the man broke down only with one. It would be a very serious loss to the portrait if Aldrich's poetic gift itself were not touched by the same inviolable reserve.

But to the letters, with their charm of friendship and bubbling

humor, and their trenchant comment on things literary and especially American things literary. One hardly sees how, fresh from a reading of them, any critic could have the hardihood to dispute Mr. Aldrich's claim as a writer of prose. Novelist he may not have been in any large sense—though the author of "Marjorie Daw" and "The Story of a Bad Boy" does not need to be measured by the novelist's rule. But there is humor as irresistible as Stevenson's, and never overtaken by the self-consciousness that now and then troubled even Stevenson's social muse, and occasionally a bit of prose, full-flavored, poetic, worthy of Keats himself. We are thinking of a certain letter to Howells, half-whimsical, half-melancholy, touched with the pathos of passing things. It is hard to choose from material so rich, but this passage from another letter written to Stedman after six years' residence in Boston serves the double purpose of showing Aldrich's intellectual bent and catching the flavor of his wit:

"In the six years I have been here I have found seven or eight hearts so full of noble things that there is no room in them for such trifles as envy and conceit and insincerity. I didn't find more than two or three such hearts in New York, and I lived there fifteen years. It was an excellent school for me—to get out of! I wonder that I got out of it with my English tolerably correct. It is a great world, and I would come back to it (you see I am writing as if I were a disembodied spirit with particularly snug quarters in Heaven) if I could drive a four-in-hand, own a couple of opera-houses with all the Terpsichorean live-stock, and be colonel of the Ninth Regiment in pleasant weather. Nothing short of this would induce me. Life in a young palace here, with plenty of friends and books and reasons for loving both, is better than poverty in New York."

And lest some profane New-Yorker should comment on Aldrich's provincialism, here is the opening paragraph of our critic's last letter:

"DEAR WOODBERRY,—I have just finished reading your 'Emerson.' It is a beautiful book, and is to be rated with your finest critical work. How fine I consider that you know of old. I was freshly impressed by your statement of the gray atmosphere and severe surroundings of Emerson's life. What a salted-down and austere existence it was! How few luxuries in it! Emerson's mind would have been enriched if he could have had more terrapin and less fish-ball."

Again this whimsical fling at contemporary taste in literature is most characteristic:

"I shall go there without any literary plans, unless I carry out my idea of turning 'The Eve of St. Agnes' into Kiplingese. Wouldn't it be delicious!

"'St. Hagnes Heve! 'ow bloomin' chill it was!

The Howl, for all his hulster, was a-cold.

The 'are limped tremblin' through the blarsted grass,'

Etc., etc.

I think it might make Keats popular again—poor Keats, who didn't know any better than to write pure English. The dear boy wasn't 'up' to writing 'Gawd' instead of God."

Here, certainly, we have a critic with his own clearly defined intellectual personality. Of Whitman he writes:

"Where he is fine, he is fine in precisely the way of conventional poets. The greater bulk of his writing is neither prose nor verse, and certainly it is not an improvement on either. A glorious line now and then, and a striking bit of color here and there, do not constitute a poet for the *People*. There never was a poet so calculated to please a very few."

And of Lanier he says: "I think Lanier was a musician, and not a poet."

Somewhat in this way, doubtless, a member of the French Academy might speak, if he were born into Boston and called upon to pass judgment on American letters. As a critic Aldrich had his canonical code, a body of tradition behind him, and a great reverence for the technique of his craft. He was artist in every fibre of his finely bred intellectual personality, and to an extent hardly counterparted by his American contemporaries. If there is a touch of caste in his judgments, we forgive them, because they are so utterly without personal prejudice and rancor, and because he brought to his own work the same cool and dispassionate consideration. Letters in this volume to Mabie, to Sherman, and to others have forestalled all future criticism of his work in their modest self-knowledge. Indeed, there was no one more open to criticism, less occupied with the little vanities of authorship, than Aldrich. Only for his ideal was he a partisan.

"'What you say about over-elaboration,' he writes to Stedman, 'is admirable. That is *bad* technique. The things that have come down to us, the things that have lasted, are *perfect in form*. I believe that many a fine thought has perished being inadequately expressed, and I know that many a light fancy is immortal because of its perfect wording. Moreover, I have a theory that *poor material* is incapable of the highest finish. You can't make even statuettes out of butter.'"

If Aldrich's letters had no other distinction, they would still be a priceless manual for critics, in our uncritical land.

And yet we have to deal finally not with a critic but with a poet. Perhaps one reason for that superficial impression of this life that it is not pre-eminently a poet's biography, is the entire lack of romantic egotism in the subject. As Aldrich himself says humorously of Poe: "I've an idea that if Poe had been an exemplary, conventional, tax-oppressed citizen, like Longfellow, his few poems, as striking as they are, would not have made so great a stir." Partly, too, it is the effect of the biographer's reserve, but that is a reserve very clearly reflected in Aldrich's own muse. In a very significant note to an "Atlantic" contributor, Aldrich says: "Why should we print in a magazine those intimate revelations which we wouldn't dream of confiding to the bosom of an utter stranger at an evening party? In what respect does the stranger differ from the public which we are so ready to take into our confidence?" And one thinks immediately of a certain well-known poem of Aldrich, which has been purged of its personal references in the last edition. But there is something here other than a self-conscious guarding of the emotions. There is the temperamental necessity of a peculiarly sensitive gift. "If anything should happen to my boy I'd never again set pen to paper," he wrote, before the great sorrow of his life, and, as a matter of fact, "his literary faculty was shrivelled by it," writes his biographer, "as by a touch of evil magic." One thinks by contrast of the thrilling beauty of Emerson's "Threnody" and how it welled straight out of the deep heart of passion. It is a typical difference of genius. Aldrich's personal life was singularly concentrated and deep, but his delicate art was meant to be the vehicle of lighter moods than the full-charged heart of passion, and he was entirely content to have it so.

It is this entire faith in his own particular poetic mission which is the secret of Aldrich's perfection as an artist and part of the man's own singular simplicity of character and of temperament. He was untroubled by artistic aims not his own; perhaps he did not greatly care for them, as a more versatile and complex sympathy like Mr. Howells's has cared for them. By the storm and stress of contemporary life, by the intellectual unrest, the thirst for strong sensation, the moral misgivings of our at once materialistic and romantic civilization he was hardly touched. For

some this will always limit his humanity as a poet; and yet for a chosen few he will have at certain moments a keener thrill for the spirit than any other American, perhaps, save Emerson. There is something here, the real poetic afflatus, as we feel it only in a very few. The white fire at the centre of Aldrich's art was the singleness of his passion for beauty. He served her with his whole heart, without any misgiving or the hope of any reward of fame, and there are certain immortal lines of his which simply for their beauty hold the secret of all love, the pathos of life and death, their mystery and their consecration.

EDITH BAKER BROWN.

“ORTHODOXY.”*

SOME years ago, Mr. G. K. Chesterton produced an astonishing book called “Heretics,” which dealt with things in general from the point of view of a man who disagreed with the Twentieth Century. It was received more like a popular novel than like a philosophical religious work: that is to say, it was read passionately and praised for its style regardless of its substance; according to the convention that a man's attitude toward the universe is important only as to the expressive grace of its pose. It was against this very notion, oddly enough, that the whole attack of the book was directed. It says, substantially: “The one most important thing in a man, especially if he be prominent, is his philosophy, his message; and many prominent modern philosophies are dangerously wrong. Mr. Kipling's *Cosmopolitanism* is wrong; the *Carpe Diem* of the ‘Rubaiyat’ is wrong; Mr. Lowes Dickinson's Neo-Paganism is wrong; the cult of the Superman is wrong.” And so on with several other modern Ideas of more or less importance. To this, people made the natural and obvious reply: “You attack the philosophies of others. Well, what is your own?” And Mr. Chesterton has answered with his new volume “Orthodoxy,” in which he confesses his faith as the Christianity of the Apostles' Creed, and expounds how and why he finds all fulfilment therein. It is a book of surprising thought surprisingly expressed.

And it is with his expression that we have first to deal. For Mr. Chesterton's manner of speech has been so much talked of

* “Orthodoxy.” By Gilbert K. Chesterton. New York: John Lane Co.